

Lebanon awaits February vaccine arrival as cases surge

Author:

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BEIRUT: Lebanon's health minister in the caretaker government, Hamad Hassan, who is in hospital fighting a coronavirus infection, has signed the first payment of financial dues for government and private hospitals from the country's World Bank loan.

The decision came after hospitals protested against delays in the paying of bills for coronavirus treatments.

About 15,000 beds have been allocated in Lebanese hospitals for use by COVID-19 patients, with 13,000 in private hospitals and 2,000 in government hospitals.

But every bed in Lebanon's hospitals is occupied, together with emergency departments, where hundreds of patients wait for beds to become available. Lebanon's nationwide lockdown is scheduled to remain in effect until Monday. It will be reviewed after the country's infection rate is examined in the coming days.

Salma Assi, head of the Medical Equipment and Devices Importers Syndicate, said: "Companies received their requests for oxygen equipment today. Some companies expect to receive their requests during this week and others at the end of the week."

Lebanon is facing a lack of oxygen machines following a huge surge in demand as the coronavirus pandemic wreaks havoc on the country, with some citizens stockpiling them for private use.

Assi said: "A mechanism has been put in place to prevent the monopoly of these machines so that the device is delivered based on a doctor's order, only if a patient can prove a positive PCR test.

"There are a lot of machines on the market. We do not know how they were brought or how effective they are. They were sold on the black market."

Lebanon's lockdown measures have also been compromised in parts of the country. Health violations were recorded in popular areas after shop owners and craftsmen pretended to close their businesses, but continued to trade behind closed doors.

Head of the Lebanese Parliamentary Health Committee Assem Araji told Arab News: "There is a need to motivate people to stay in their homes during the remainder of the total closure, which, according to scientific information, should be for three weeks."

"We hear the cries of hungry people who live day by day and need an income, who say that they cannot afford a bundle of bread.

"Half of the Lebanese live on minimum pay, which has lost its value with the collapse of the Lebanese pound.

"What is required is cash assistance, and this has not happened yet. As for talking about support from here and there, it has no value.

"The cases that we witnessed in the middle of this month are the result of socializing in New Year's parties, but the cases that are recorded now are the result of the socializing that took place just after the total lockdown

decision, because people were given a few days to go shopping, so unprecedented movement took place in supermarkets – the results of which we see today.”

Araji warned that only a mass vaccination campaign could bring the situation under control.

“We expect the first batch of vaccines to arrive in the first week of February.

“The required mechanism for vaccination has been put in place, and it will take place in government hospitals. There are 35 sites for this.”

Araji said that medical and nursing staff, and those aged over 75 will be prioritized for vaccination when the rollout begins.

Does that mean President Michel Aoun and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri will be first in line for the vaccine, as they are over 80?

“There are other politicians who are over 75 as well,” Araji said.



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Lebanon signs with Pfizer for 2.1 million vaccine doses
Shops shut and streets empty as Lebanon enters strictest COVID-19 lockdown

Egyptian leader in Jordan for post-Trump strategy talks

Author:

Mon, 2021-01-18 23:53

AMMAN: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi was greeted upon arrival in the Jordanian capital Amman on Monday for a bilateral summit aimed at preparing the political ground for the post-President Donald Trump era. The visit followed an important meeting of Jordanian, Egyptian and Palestinian intelligence officers in Ramallah on Jan. 16.

Adnan Abu Odeh, former adviser of King Hussein and King Abdullah, told Arab News that the flurry of meetings reflects important political movement in the region.

Abu Odeh pointed to a key meeting on Jan. 11 that was held in Cairo for the Quartet for peace in the Middle East that also included the foreign ministers of France and Germany.

Jordan and Egypt are emerging as potential new members of the Quartet after the foreign ministers of both countries joined a meeting of the multilateral forum in Cairo last week.

The Quartet, consisting of the UN, EU, US and Russia, was established in 2002 to help mediate Middle East peace negotiations.

"Regional and international officials are trying to fix the problems that were caused by President Trump, especially in regards to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, support to UNRWA and the reopening of diplomatic offices between Palestinians and the US," Abu Odeh said, pointing out that Jordan has 2 million registered Palestinian refugees.

Oraib Rantawi, director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, told Arab News that the flurry of movement also reflects the decision by the Palestinian president to hold new elections this summer.

"What the Jordanian and Egyptian leaders are concerned about is the possible results of the elections. They are not in the mood for any new surprises," he said.

Rantawi was referring to the victory of a pro-Hamas slate in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections that eventually triggered an international boycott of Gaza and a deep Palestinian split.

Palestinian leaders are expected to meet in Cairo in the coming days to discuss, among other issues, the possibility of Fatah and Hamas reconciling by means of participating in the coming elections with a single joint list. Rantawi also said that the recent normalization of relations between two Gulf countries and Israel will "not make much of a difference" through the Biden era.

"It is possible that some of the Gulf countries will be expected to increase support for UNRWA and to help Gaza dig itself out of the long economic siege that it had suffered from," Rantawi told Arab News.

According to the Egyptian presidency, the two leaders will discuss ways to boost Egyptian-Jordanian relations, in addition to exchanging views on regional issues in light of the keenness of both sides for regular coordination to unify efforts to protect Arab national security.

Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq are also emerging as an economic grouping with an emphasis on the need for cooperation on energy and agriculture.



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Jordan's King Abdullah, Egypt's El-Sisi meet in bid to reignite Mid-East peace talks
Jordan condemns Israel's approval of new settler homes in West Bank

[Palestinians urge EU to send monitors for May/July polls](#)

Author:

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Mon, 2021-01-18 16:54

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian prime minister on Monday called on the European Union to send observers to elections scheduled for later this year, specifically requesting EU monitors in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on Friday signed a decree setting legislative elections for May 22 and a presidential vote on July 31, in what

would be the first Palestinian polls in 15 years.

Ahead of a weekly cabinet meeting, prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh called on the EU "to prepare a team of international observers to help us, mainly in the election process in Jerusalem."

Israel annexed east Jerusalem following the 1967 Six Day in a move never recognized by most of the international community, which considers the area occupied Palestinian territory.

The Jewish state bans all activities of the Palestinian Authority, based in the occupied West Bank, inside Jerusalem, a city labelled Israel's "undivided capital" by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

There has been no indication that Israel would allow Palestinian election activity within east Jerusalem.

"We will formally ask Israel to allow our people in Jerusalem to participate in the elections," Shtayyeh stressed.

Brussels on Friday said it welcomed Abbas's election call and urged Israel to "facilitate the holding of these elections throughout the Palestinian territory," including east Jerusalem.

The Palestinian polls have been scheduled amid warming ties between Abbas's Fatah party, which controls the PA, and their long-standing rivals Hamas, the Islamist that holds power in Gaza.

The 2005 Palestinian presidential vote saw Abbas elected with 62 percent support to replace the late Yasser Arafat.

In the last Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, Hamas won an unexpected landslide.

The polls resulted in a brief unity government but it soon collapsed and in 2007, bloody clashes erupted in the Gaza Strip between the two principal Palestinian factions, with Hamas ultimately seizing control of Gaza.



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Palestinian president briefs Egypt, Jordan on election plan
Israel Prison Service to vaccinate Palestinian inmates

[Yemen's government vows to mitigate effects of Houthi terrorism designation](#)

Mon, 2021-01-18 00:37

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's prime minister has vowed to address any impact on humanitarian assistance or the remittances of citizens abroad following the US move to designate the Iran-backed Houthis as a terrorist organization.

Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed also urged the international community not to surrender to "Houthi blackmailing" and intimidation.

Saeed defended his government's strong support of the designation during a virtual interview with foreign journalists sponsored by the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies.

He said that his government had formed a committee to handle any effects on the delivery of humanitarian assistance inside Houthi-controlled areas and the remittances of Yemenis abroad.

"We are determined to prevent any impact of the decision on the Yemenis. We have formed a committee to mitigate effects of the decision," he said.

When the US announced its intention to designate the Houthi movement as a terrorist organization last week, Yemen's government quickly urged the US administration to put the decision in place, predicting it would stop Houthi crimes and their looting of humanitarian assistance, and would smoothe the way for peace.

Referring to the impact of the US designation on peace talks between the Yemeni government and the Houthis, Saeed said that the decision would not undermine peace efforts. He said that the Houthis would be accepted as part of the Yemeni political and social spectrum when they abandoned hard-line ideologies and embraced equality and justice.

The Yemeni government agreed to go to Stockholm for reaching a solution to stop fighting and saving the city. This model has failed.

Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed, Yemen's prime minister

"This is an important pressure card on them and a real definition of them," he said, adding that the Yemenis would not allow the Houthi movement to rule them.

"Yemen would not be ruled by a racist and terrorist group," he said. Formed under the Riyadh Agreement, Yemen's new government's ministers narrowly escaped death on Dec. 30 when three precision-guided missiles ripped through Aden airport shortly after their plane touched down.

The government accused the Houthis of staging the attack, saying that missile fragments collected from the airport showed that they were similar to missiles that targeted Marib city in the past.

The prime minister said that the Yemeni government had offered many concessions to reach an agreement to end the war. It had agreed to engage in direct talks with the Houthis in Stockholm in 2018 despite the fact that the Yemeni government forces were about to seize control of the Red Sea city of Hodeidah. However, the Stockholm Agreement had failed to bring peace to Yemen, he said.

"The government forces were about to capture the city within five days maximum. The Yemeni government agreed to go to Stockholm for reaching a solution to stop fighting and saving the city. This model has failed," Saeed said.

In Riyadh, Yemen's president Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi on Friday appointed Ahmed Obeid bin Daghar, a former prime minister and a senior adviser to the president, as president of the Shoura Council.

Hadi also appointed Ahmed Ahmed Al-Mousai as the country's new attorney general.

Fighting continues

Heavy fighting between Yemeni government forces and the Houthis broke out on Sunday for the third consecutive day in contested areas in the districts of Hays and Durihimi in the western province of Hodeidah. Official media said that dozens of Houthi rebels and several government troops were killed in the fighting and loyalists pushed back three assaults by Houthis in Durihimi district.

In neighboring Hays, the Joint Forces media said on Sunday that the Houthis hit government forces with heavy weapons before launching a ground attack in an attempt to seize control of new areas in the district.

The Houthis failed to make any gains and lost dozens of fighters along with several military vehicles that were burnt in the fighting, the same media outlets said. Heavy artillery shelling and land mines planted by the Houthis have killed more than 500 civilians since late 2018, local rights groups said.



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Still hope for Yemen despite violence and famine, says UN envoy
Workshop outlines plans for malaria support in Yemen

[Patients die at home as Lebanese oxygen supplies run low](#)

Mon, 2021-01-18 00:28

BEIRUT: Many doctors specializing in bacterial and infectious diseases expect a further jump in the number of people infected with COVID-19 next week in Lebanon with hospitals exceeding their capacity.

On Sunday, the total number of laboratory-confirmed infections exceeded a quarter of a million people in the country.

In the first 17 days of the year 67,655 new cases were recorded, and the lockdown period is expected to be extended for at least 10 more days.

Suleiman Haroun, head of the Lebanese Syndicate of Private Hospitals, said: "The epidemiological scene in Lebanon reflects part of the reality, not all

of it. The real situation will be worse yet.”

He said: “All the beds designated for COVID-19 patients in hospitals are occupied, as well as in emergency departments, and there are dozens of patients moving from one hospital to another in search of a bed. Hospitals have exceeded their capacity.”

Pulmonologist and intensive care specialist Dr. Wael Jaroush said: “I have never seen anything like what I see in the hospitals now. I never imagined that I would ever go through such an experience. There is no room for patients in the emergency departments.

“They are dying in their homes. Some of them are begging to buy oxygen generators, new or second hand.

“The price of a new one is normally \$700, yet people are selling used devices for about \$5,000, and some patients are forced to buy them in foreign currency, meaning that the patient’s family buy the dollar on the black market for more than LBP8,000.”

Jaroush said that patients were infected with the virus because of mixing with other people at the end of last year and in the first 10 days of January. He expected that their number would increase during Monday and Tuesday. He would wait to see if the numbers declined on Wednesday and Thursday.

He said that 10-liter oxygen bottles and smaller ones are out of stock “because of the high demand on them, either for storage due to lack of confidence in the state, or because they are not available in hospitals.”

“As a doctor, I come across patients who tell me that they bought the oxygen bottle two months ago, for example, and put it in their homes, just as they did when they resorted to storing medicines.”

He pointed out: “These oxygen bottles do not last long. A COVID-19 patient who cannot find a vacant bed in the hospital and is asked to find oxygen and stay at home needs 40 or 50 liters of oxygen. So when the 10-liter oxygen bottle runs out, the patient dies because his heart stops. This is happening now and some patients have died in their homes.”

Jaroush said: “The cardiologist Dr. Mustafa Al-Khatib suffered from COVID-19 yesterday and could not find even a chair in the emergency department. Since yesterday we doctors have been trying to find a place for him so that he can have a blood test and a scan for his lungs. This is our situation.”

On Sunday, it was announced that the Military Hospital in Beirut also exceeded its capacity. The hospital cares for military personnel and their families.

This prompted its management to take 23 rooms in a private hospital that was damaged in the Beirut port explosion last August. The Lebanese Army Works Regiment is working to make it available within days to accommodate cases that need intensive care.

In addition to the lack of capacity, there was also a lack of medical supplies.

Activists on social media circulated calls to secure oxygen bottles that are needed for patients in hospitals that are needed for patients.

The search for hospital beds has caused disputes between the Lebanese Red Cross paramedics and some hospitals.

Georges Kettaneh, Lebanese Red Cross secretary-general, said: “The Red Cross responds to all crises in the country, especially COVID-19, and from the beginning we demanded hospitals to be ready. It was expected that disputes would arise between the Red Cross and some hospitals due to the decision of the Minister of Health in the caretaker government, Hamad Hassan, to receive all cases in hospitals.”

Assem Araji, the head of parliament’s health committee, said: “Despite the sanctions that the Ministry of Health decided to impose on some private hospitals that did not respond to the request to open departments to receive patients, certain hospitals did not comply. We have reached a catastrophic stage that calls for national responsibility.”

Araji expressed his belief that “a complete lockdown for 11 days is not sufficient to limit the spread of the virus. Rather, it should be closed for three weeks, as recommended by the World Health Organization.”

Many well-known figures in Lebanon have died of the coronavirus during the past days.



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Lebanon signs with Pfizer for 2.1 million vaccine doses
Lebanon approves law to import vaccines as coronavirus hits new record